

April 23, 2023 3rd Sunday of Easter
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Acts 2:14a, 36-41, Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
Luke 24:13-35

<https://nicholastangen.com/blog/> Renewal at the Dinner Table, 4-13-23.

Telling Each Other the Gospel

Alleluia, Christ is Risen. **Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia!**
Grace and peace to you, people of the risen Christ. Amen.

Tis the season for resurrection stories!

At Easter Vigil we heard Matthew's telling, notable for its earth quake
and how in surprise they fall to worship Jesus holding his feet.

On Easter Morning, we heard *one* of John's resurrection stories, surely the most familiar,
where Mary, through her tears, thinks Jesus to be the gardener.

Last week our kids and teens focused on the story of Thomas, Doubting Thomas we often call him,
so full of questions, desperate to experience Jesus again, himself,
and Jesus gets it, meets Thomas where he's at: touch my hands, feel my side, peace be with you.

And there's that wonderful resurrection story on the seashore just after day break,
where Jesus makes a fire and they share bread and fish and know it is him.

Today's gospel resurrection story, the Road to Emmaus, is one of my all-time favorites.

There are so many angles:

Years ago, my spouse Jane and I picked this as the gospel readings at our wedding.

It had it captured our imaginations:

walking together on the road,
trying to make sense of it all,
the weight of that line, "We had hoped..."
the blessings of a stranger,
the invitation to stay,
the shared hospitality at the table with its bread,
the retrospective surprise of realizing it was Jesus in their midst... the whole time,
in *our* midst... the whole time

Just a month ago, we heard the Road to Emmaus story at Wayne Westwood's funeral.

Wayne loved to bake bread and we focused on Jesus made known in the breaking of the bread.

This week I've been thinking about this Road to Emmaus story in yet another way.

I've been focused on location, on the places where Jesus shows up.

In a recent blog, Nick Tangen reflected on “what we can learn about the church from the location of Jesus’ resurrection appearances – neighborhoods, living rooms, and seashores” and I would add dusty roads and dinner tables.

Some years back Nick led our community engagement and faith formation ministry here at Hope. Now Nick serves at the synod office, inviting all the Lutheran congregations in this area to connect more deeply to their neighborhood.

In his blog, Nick writes about a bigger conversation taking place in the ELCA about structure and relationship, how congregations and synods and the whole ELCA relate to one another.

Nick writes, “The holy disruption of the resurrection shows up in the sacred and simple practices of Jesus followers . . . doing life together.”

He pointedly continues: “Jesus did not appear to the Temple hierarchy or the Roman senate, [Jesus] appeared in the homes and the neighborhoods of the laity and the citizen and entrusted the care of the church to each of them.”

Let me say that part again, it's at the heart today:

“Jesus did not appear to the Temple hierarchy or the Roman senate, [Jesus] appeared in the homes and the neighborhoods of the laity and the citizen and entrusted the care of the church to each of them.”

In today's story, without their knowing, Jesus meets the Cleopas and the other disciple as they walk that road from Jerusalem to Emmaus

deep is conversation, mired in grief, their hopes dashed and depleted.

Then it's at the dinner table that Jesus sits with them, breaking bread, and still they don't recognize him.

Nick writes, “I wonder how the stories of Jesus’ resurrection appearances might inform our work to restructure and reimagine our ecclesiology [the church] from the bottom up.”

He continues: “We may find that we are called to seek Jesus and proclaim his resurrection in the gardens and green spaces of our communities like Mary Magdalene.

We may follow the lead of Cleopas and his friend by walking in our neighborhoods and telling every neighbor we see about what God has done in Jesus.

We may gather at one another's homes, across the dinner table,

remembering the Last Supper and the care and hospitality that Jesus shared with his disciples.
We may extend a practice of care to those neighbors at work in their vocations
– a little warm breakfast perhaps?”

A month or two back, I had a note from one of you after a Monday evening “Bible and Brew”.

Yep, it is exactly what it sounds like: a brew of some sort

and a chance to read together and discuss the Bible passages for the coming weekend.

One of those who’d been part of the group that evening, sent a note afterward.

It said simply: **“Good conversation, and a blessing to tell each other the gospel.”**

That phrase has been tumbling around in my mind and heart all these weeks:

“We told each other the gospel.”

We told each other the gospel.

Dear ones, that’s what’s happening on the road as Cleopas and the other disciple walk along.

That’s what’s happening at the dinner table as this stranger breaks bread and their hearts are warmed.

And that’s what happens as you listen to a friend, or keep vigil at a bedside, or face hard decisions.

We quietly squeeze a hand and tell each other the gospel.

That’s what happens as you help an aging parent transition with dignity,

or make decisions that protect the water and the earth and sky.

or care for little ones even when patience is stretched and weariness is real.

We tell each other the gospel.

That’s what happens as you stand shoulder to shoulder calling for justice,

or teach or study or heal, as you create or counsel.

We tell each other the gospel.

That’s what you’re doing, that’s what we’re doing.

This morning we’ll baptize Margot XXXXXXX.

Margot is 2 years old

Not long ago I spent a little time with Margot and her mom and dad and big sister XXXX at their house.

We sat around their dinner table and talked about baptism:

How it’s in baptism that God marks us as + Christ’s own.

How Jesus will love us always and forever and how there’s nothing we can do to stop that love.

How good it is to remember our baptisms when we’re at church,

but also when we wash our hands or take a bath or walk in the rain.

At one point I was asking who would be at today's baptism.

I was thinking about Godparents like XXXX and grandparents and family.

Without missing a beat and with great joy, Margot stretched out her arms and smiling exclaimed: Margot!

It's with that joy that God welcomes Margot and all of us, and that we'll baptize Margot.

I pray, it's with that joy that she can learn and practice her story and God's story intertwined,

deepening as she grows,

rooted always in her baptismal identity.

That's what we do at the dinner table and in the bathtub, on the playground and snuggling before bed.

We tell each other the gospel, again and again and again.

My friends, let us be a community of faith, people of the risen Christ

grounded in grace,

open to the journey,

and centered, always centered, in love.

Amen.